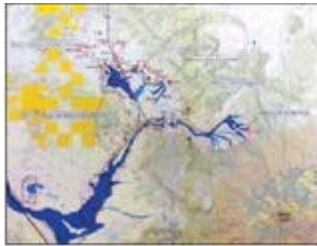


**From:** [Earle Dixon](#)  
**To:** [Purcell, Mark](#); [Criner, Jeffrey J.](#)  
**Subject:** SMC NPL Article  
**Date:** Friday, January 12, 2018 4:26:32 PM

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## **MULTICULTURAL ALLIANCE FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT (MASE)**

4 days ago



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EPA proposes San Mateo Creek Basin as Superfund site January 6, 2018 By Kathy Helms Cibola County Bureau [cibola@gallupindependent.com](mailto:cibola@gallupindependent.com) GRANTS — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is proposing to add the San Mateo Creek Basin to its Superfund National Priorities List in March and is seeking concurrence from the state of New Mexico and local governments, the city of Grants learned Thursday. The San Mateo Creek Basin, located in the Grants Mining District, comprises approximately 321 square miles within the Rio San Jose drainage basin in McKinley and Cibola counties. Representatives from the New Mexico Environment Department plan to brief the Cibola County Board of Commissioners on the plan during the board's Jan. 25 meeting. There are numerous legacy uranium mines within the basin, many of which operated as wet mines where underground workings were dewatered and the mine water – some treated, some not – was discharged to nearby surface drainage features such as San Mateo Creek and Arroyo del Puerto. Contaminated groundwater The mine discharge water from 26 of the wet mines infiltrated into the soils and sediment and significantly resaturated portions of the alluvium and underlying bedrock aquifers throughout the basin, contributing to degradation of the groundwater quality, Carl Edlund, director of the Superfund Division for EPA Region 6, stated in a Nov. 16 letter to New Mexico Environment Department. The basin is proposed to be added to the National Priorities List based on evidence that hazardous substances have impacted private drinking water wells and threaten to impact public water supplies within the district. Privately owned drinking water wells exceed state and federal standards for total uranium and gross alpha radiation levels, the letter states. "Due to the site complexity, nature of the groundwater and number of potential sources, listing is needed as a comprehensive framework to address the groundwater contamination and as a mechanism to compel the Potentially Responsible Parties to participate in site remediation," Edlund stated. EPA requested a written response from the state by Jan. 12 indicating whether it supports placement of the site on the National Priorities List. If it is not in support, the state is asked to describe an alternative approach to ensure the associated releases will be addressed. Edlund said EPA will share information with the community regarding the state's position, including posting the information on the internet, however, he did not say when that sharing would occur. EPA is committed to working cooperatively with the state and local community during the listing and cleanup process, he said, and to ensure the agency's actions are conducted in an open and transparent manner. Where's the transparency? Grants City Manager Laura Jaramillo said she received a call from Valerie Taylor, interim county manager for Cibola County, inviting her to a meeting Thursday with Mark Garman and Kurt Vollbrecht of New Mexico Environment Department. She said Taylor thought the state was going to offer money to the local governments to clean up Superfund sites. "Basically, they're telling us that NMED and Superfund are proposing that this goes on the Superfund National Priorities List and they want letters of concurrence from us," Jaramillo said. "My perspective is I need more information. I'm not an expert on this. I don't know all of the aspects. I don't feel comfortable saying, 'Yes, the city of Grants concurs,' (based) on an hour meeting that I'm having with them. I need to research it and I want to hear from the mining industry that will be impacted. I want to hear from our citizens." Grants Mayor Martin "Modey" Hicks said the city did not receive any notice of the meeting other than Taylor's call. "The city manager wasn't even invited (by NMED). She was invited by the county manager. So I don't know if they wanted us there or not. We're not sure. We didn't get nothing in writing, we didn't get no invite. Nothing. Which makes it look like they're trying to push this thing through without

involving all of the parties that need to be involved,” he said. “But to ask the managers for a letter of concurrence without the approval of their respective boards, commissions or councils is totally wrong, period.” Jaramillo said no one was there to represent McKinley County, local pueblos and tribes. “Why didn’t they invite everybody? Why didn’t they contact the mayors and say, ‘We need a letter of concurrence from your councils that’s in favor of this,’ instead of going to the managers that work for the councils and saying, ‘We want you to write ...’” Hicks said. ‘Backdoor’ approach? He sent a letter Friday to Gov. Susana Martinez stating that the city had been asked by New Mexico Environment Department to write a letter of concurrence regarding the listing. He noted that the meeting with the state was Jan. 4 and the letter was needed prior to Jan. 12, when the Environment Department would be submitting its letter. Hicks said the city does not feel comfortable concurring with such an initiative that could have tremendous impact on the region without first having more extensive information, gaining community input, and being afforded an opportunity to hear from the mining industry partners who will be greatly impacted. “Because this request came at the last minute, and without public meetings, it gives the appearance that it is a backdoor way to push this through without all affected (parties) having knowledge,” the mayor stated. “This makes us suspicious as to whether this is the right thing to do.” Garman stated in an email Friday to the managers that the public involvement process begins once a site is on the list of “proposed” National Priorities List sites. “The only commitment being asked of the local governments at this time is concurrence for ‘proposal’ of NPL listing. Once the site is officially proposed and added to the list of Proposed NPL Sites, the public information process begins,” he said, during which the public and government officials will have an opportunity to comment. Village of Milan Manager Paul Peña said Friday, “All they told us yesterday was that the groundwater was contaminated – which we already know – and what they wanted to do was go forward and talk to the governor to find out if they can pursue these companies that were mining here back in the 1970s. They said, at this point, they wanted to contact them and find out if they would put money in for funding to do research, to find out how it can be cleaned up, if it can be cleaned up. “I stated that with the limited amount of information that we have at this time, the village of Milan doesn’t have any objection, but we reserve the right to object, depending on specific information that we receive,” Peña said. Cibola’s Taylor was in Santa Fe Friday meeting with state officials about the county’s financial situation and was unavailable for comment. A map shows the San Mateo Creek Basin, which is being proposed for the Superfund National Priorities List. Kathy Helms/Independent

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